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ABSTRACT

Over 150,000 Indochinese immigrants live in California, many of whom choose to reside in the Central Valley. While this population includes individuals of Vietnamese, Chinese-Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Thai extraction, by far the largest group living in the Fresno area are the Hmong, currently estimated at over 6,000 persons. In order to assess the educational progress of Hmong students attending preschool through sixth-grade classes, a survey was administered in cooperation with the Fresno Unified School District. Since a standardized instrument was not available, a teacher rating scale was developed. The "Hmong Student Impact Survey" was designed to gather information concerning the performance of Hmong students in the following areas: (1) social-emotional development; (2) language arts; (3) mathematics; (4) art, music, and physical education; and (5) parent involvement. Other relevant data were collected regarding school placement, grade assignment, teachers' experience, classroom ethnicity, English-language proficiency, participation in educational intervention programs, and previous schooling. Up to 5 students in 16 schools were rated by teachers. Results of the surveys, completed in April of the 1981-1982 school year, are discussed. (RH)

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Report on the Educational Progress of Hmong Students in
Fresno Unified School District Elementary Schools

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Education Progress of Hmong Students in
Fresno Unified School District Elementary Schools

Introduction

Over 150,000 Indochinese immigrants are in California, many of whom are choosing to reside in the Central Valley. Trends indicate that the Fresno population is undergoing a dramatic increase due to the "secondary migration" of refugees from other parts of California as well as other states. While this population includes Vietnamese, Chinese-Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Thai, by far the largest group living in the Fresno area are the Hmong, currently estimated at over 6,000 persons (Ramirez, Note 1). Like other newly arrived immigrants, Hmongs have had to confront problems with language, housing and employment, to cope with differences in food and climate, and to make drastic lifestyle changes in adapting to life in America. Education is of fundamental importance to successful adjustment, especially for the school-aged children who comprise almost 45% of Indochinese immigrants (Goor, 1980).

Problem

According to Liff (1980), the extreme differences in cultural background of Indochinese immigrants require that public schools not only give English language and basic skills instruction, but also provide exposure to American cultural practices and values. However, the schools must attempt to balance dominate culture with ethnic culture (Chan, 1981). Cultural and language differences make educational assessment difficult. The

lack of any standard methods for accurately evaluating students may result in failure to detect the specific nature of their educational problems.

Purpose

In cooperation with Fresno Unified School District, a survey was administered to ascertain the educational progress of Hmong students, pre-school through grade 6. Since a standardized instrument was not available, a teacher rating scale was developed. The "Hmong Student Impact Survey" was designed to gather information concerning the performance of Hmong students in the following areas: 1) Social-Emotional Development; b) Language Arts; c) Mathematics; d) Art, Music and Physical Education; and 3) Parent Involvement. Other relevant data were solicited regarding school placement, grade assignment, teacher's experience, classroom ethnicity, and English language proficiency, participation in educational intervention programs, and previous schooling.

Procedure

Sixteen schools within Fresno Unified School District having Hmong students were identified. Teachers in these schools were asked to complete the "Hmong Student Impact Survey" for each of the Hmong students in their classroom, up to five students. Teachers having more than five Hmong students were instructed in how to select at random five Hmong students for rating. The surveys were completed in April of the 1981-1982 school year.

Results

A total of 178 teachers in 15 of the selected schools answered the Survey. Data were collected on 506 Hmong students in these teachers'

classrooms. This student sample consisted of 283 boys and 223 girls. Table 1 shows the number of teacher respondents and rated Hmong students at each of the selected schools. In the table, schools are also divided according to two geographic localities. The localities are suggestive of two different socio-economic levels. Locality I schools are: Aynesworth, Burroughs, Calwa, Jefferson, Lowell, Mayfair, Rowell, Webster, Winchell, and Birney. Locality II schools are: Birney, Ewing, Norseman, Turner, Wolters and McCardle. The significance of school locality will be discussed shortly. Table 2 reports the number of teacher respondents and rated Hmong students at each grade level. Note that the number of preschool students in the sample was too low for meaningful analysis.

Teachers' mean ratings of Hmong students were tabulated for survey items, survey categories and the total survey. Table 3 displays these mean rating scores. To assist interpretation, the rating scale used was: 1 = Poor, 2 = Below Average, 3 = Average, 4 = Above Average, 5 = Superior. Thus, a rating of 3 meant that the Hmong student was judged to be performing "average" in the specified area in comparison to his/her classmates who were not Hmong. Variations in the number of students rated for each item is attributable to the fact that teachers were given the option of marking "0 = Not Acceptable" for any given item. Inclusion of this option may have resulted in elevation of mean ratings particularly in academic areas.

Mean rating results indicated that the strongest area of performance for Hmong students as a group was related to their social-emotional development (Category Total = 3.54). Items for which students were given especially positive ratings were: Respects Property (3.83); Desire to

Learn (3.79); Classroom Behavior (3.90); and Task Persistence (3.73). The area of weakest performance was in the involvement of parents in the educational program of their child (Category Total = 2.14). As would be expected, language arts was the area of the curriculum in which Hmong students were given the lowest rating (Category Total = 2.84). If the item "Recognizes Alphabet Letters" is eliminated, the mean rating drops to 2.71. On total survey performance, Hmong students received a mean rating of 3.16. This mean rating tends to suggest that by the end of the 1981-1982 school year, Hmong students as a group were, in general, making average educational progress in comparison to their classmates who were not Hmong.

Table 4 presents teachers' mean category ratings in terms of grade level. Grouping data in this way revealed progressively higher ratings of Hmong students from primary to upper grades. This finding was contrary to expectation. California Achievement Test results for Hmong students were in the opposite direction with a steady decline in scores from Grade 1 to Grade 6. While the survey rating pattern was consistent, the differences among grade levels were relatively small.

When data were grouped according to school locality, another trend emerged in the data. Hmong students attending schools in localities associated with a lower socio-economic level were consistently rated better than Hmong students in schools associated with a higher socio-economic level. This trend was present on an item-by-item basis. Differences in the reference classroom group against which Hmong students were rated may account for this finding.

Finally, Table 6 reports location of previous known schooling for Hmong students for whom this information was available. As can be seen, Hmong students came from a number of different states. However, the majority of Hmong students with known previous schooling outside of California had attended schools in Oregon.

Tentative results of statistical analyses currently underway point to differences in teachers' ratings of Hmong students related to: time of enrollment (beginning, middle, end of the year); number of non-English/limited English proficient students in classroom; and previous school attendance. However, these differences appear to have little, if any, instructional significance. Once completed, these results will be shared with FUSD personnel.

Conclusion

The results of this survey provide information concerning the educational status of Hmong students attending elementary schools in the Fresno Unified School District during the 1981-1982 school year. As a group, the Hmong students assessed by this survey appeared to be making, in general, average educational progress. However, the performance of individual students ranged from poor to superior for any given item.

An area of particular strength for Hmong students according to survey results was their social-emotional development. Teachers gave high ratings to Hmong students on the following items: Respects Property, Desire to Learn, Classroom Behavior, and Task Persistence. It is suggested that such characteristics not only facilitate learning and school adjustment, but also are conducive to a positive attitude toward Hmong

students on the part of teachers. Comments by teachers concerning their Hmong students are both favorable and encouraging.

Areas that may need attention are language arts and parent involvement. As would be expected, Hmong students are weak in spoken language and written language skills. Because children's early years seem to be an optimum period for second language acquisition (Andersson, 1978; McLaughlin, 1978) educational intervention focused on intensive language instruction in the primary grades is recommended. As they gain in their language proficiency, Hmong students' school performance should demonstrate continued improvement. Parent involvement and understanding of their children's educational program is low at this time. Since research attests to the important role of parents in promoting their children's educational achievement, efforts to draw parents into the school community may be beneficial. Thus, results of this survey would indicate that with adequate support, Hmong students may have a promising educational future.

Table 1
Number of Teacher Respondents and Rated Hmong Students
in 15 Schools at Two Localities

Locality	School	Teachers	Hmong Students
I	Anynesworth	3	4
	Burroughs	23	106
	Calwa	5	5
	Jefferson	15	37
	Lowell	9	20
	Mayfair	23	105
	Rowell	13	21
	Webster	9	36
	Winchell	10	15
Total		110	349
II	Birney	19	62
	Ewing	10	16
	Norseman	12	20
	Turner	4	4
	Wolters	12	43
	McCardle	11	12
Total		68	157

8

10

Table 2

Number of Teacher Respondents and Rated Hmong Students
at Each Grade Level Participating in Survey

Survey Participants	Grade								Total
	Preschool	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Teachers	1	28	33	28	25	19	23	21	178
Hmong Students	4	83	103	80	65	59	63	49	506

Table 3
Teachers' Mean Ratings of Hmong
Students on Impact Survey

Survey Category		N*	Mean
<u>Social-Emotional Development</u>	Emotional Adjustment (Entering Program)	496	3.04 †
	Emotional Adjustment (Currently)	500	3.37
	Appears Happy	502	3.46
	Interacts Positively With Classmates	502	3.18
	Respects Property	503	3.83
	Desire to Learn	503	3.79
	Classroom Behavior	502	3.90
	Task Persistence	500	3.73
	Category Total		3.54
<u>Language Arts</u>	Ease in Learning to Understand English	498	2.83
	Ease in Learning to Speak English	497	2.74
	Recognition of Alphabet Letters	482	3.38
	Reading Skills (Preschool and Kindergarten Rate Pre-reading Skills)	463	2.61
	Writing Skills (Preschool and Kindergarten Rate Pre-writing Skills)	471	2.64
	Category Total		2.84

Table 3 (continued)

<u>Mathematics</u>	Number Concepts	500	3.20
	Counting	497	3.33
	Recogniton of Numerals	490	3.40
	Computation (Addition, Subtraction)	446	3.36
	Computation (Multiplication, Division)	277	3.20
Category Total			3.30
<u>Art, Music, & P.E.</u>	Quality of Art Work	492	3.60
	Creativity	490	3.50
	Musical Ability	424	2.81
	Fine Motor Coordination	499	3.42
	Large Muscle Coordination	502	3.35
Category Total			3.33
<u>Parent Involvement</u>	Assists in Classroom	283	1.82
	Attends Conferences and Other School Meetings	364	2.30
	Show Interest in School Program	355	2.31
Category Total			2.14
SURVEY TOTAL			3.16

* The maximum number of students (N) is 506. For any given item, teachers had the option of not rating a child by assigning a score of 0 = Not Applicable. Use of this option accounts for the variation in the size of N for the items.

† The rating scores were as follows: 1 = Poor, 2 = Below Average, 3 = Average, 4 = Above Average, and 5 = Superior.

Table 4
Comparison of Mean Category Ratings of Hmong Students
in Terms of Grade Level

Grade Level	Categories					Survey Total
	Social- Emotional	Language Arts	Mathematics	Art, Music, P.E.	Parent Involvement	
Preschool - K	3.39	2.95	2.89	3.30	2.44	3.09
1-2	3.53	2.94	3.35	3.37	2.16	3.20
3-4	3.68	2.89	3.49	3.37	2.25	3.27
5-6	3.72	2.92	3.60	3.47	2.25	3.32

Table 5
Comparison of Mean Category Ratings of Hmong Students
in Terms of School Locality

Locality*	N	Categories					Survey Total
		Social Emotional	Language Arts	Mathematics	Art, Music P.E.	Parent Involvement	
I	349	3.59	2.92	3.39	3.38	2.26	3.23
II	157	3.43	2.64	3.09	3.23	1.89	3.00

* Locality I = Aynesworth, Burroughs, Calwa, Jefferson, Lowell, Mayfair, Rowell, Webster, Winchell.

Locality II = Birney, Ewing, Norseman, Turner, Wolters, McCardle.

Table 6

Location of Previous Known Schooling

State	Hmong Students N
California	
Outside of Fresno	55
Fresno Schools*	116
Colorado	4
Hawaii	10
Illinois	8
Iowa	1
Minnesota	6
North Carolina	1
Ohio	2
Oregon	60
Rhode Island	1
Tennessee	2
Utah	5
Washington	8
Wisconsin	1
Unknown Location	11
TOTAL	291

*This number may be inflated due to the fact that students whose teachers did not state the location of previous schooling were counted in this group.

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